

**ORAL TESTIMONY OF
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NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY
ADMINISTRATION
BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

HEARING ON

***UPDATE ON TOYOTA AND NHTSA'S RESPONSE
TO THE PROBLEM OF SUDDEN UNINTENDED
ACCELERATION***

May 20, 2010

**Chairman Stupak, Ranking Member Burgess and
Members of the Committee:**

**Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the
activities of the National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration with regard to unintended
acceleration incidents involving Toyota vehicles.**

**NHTSA has been very active on this subject since
Secretary LaHood testified before this committee in
February.**

Last week, Secretary LaHood and I traveled to Japan to meet with officials of the Japanese government and Toyota. Toyota officials informed us of changes they have recently made in their management and processes to ensure that Toyota officials here in the United States have a direct role in making vehicle recall decisions.

Secretary LaHood and I made it clear to Toyota officials, including Chairman Toyoda himself, that the value of these organizational changes will be determined by the company's future safety actions. We will be watching.

As you know, we initiated three separate actions in February: a timeliness query related to the pedal entrapment recall; a timeliness query related to the “sticky pedal” recall; and a recall query looking at whether those two recalls were sufficient in scope, and, whether there are other matters related to unintended acceleration in Toyota vehicles.

On April 19, Toyota agreed to pay \$16.385 million in civil penalties in connection with the sticky pedal timeliness query. This is the maximum penalty we can assess under current law. NHTSA believed the penalty was warranted because Toyota failed to inform us in a timely way about that safety defect.

Concurrently, we continue to review the large number of documents submitted by Toyota in response to the pedal entrapment timeliness query. We have not reached a decision yet on whether the facts of that case warrant a civil penalty.

We are also reviewing an extremely large volume of documents received in response to the recall query.

We have contracted with the Department of Justice to help us categorize and analyze the documents. That task will take some time—but it is underway.

NHTSA also started two research efforts to address the issue of unintended acceleration. The National Academy of Sciences – the nation’s most respected independent body of top scientific experts – will examine the broad subject of unintended acceleration and electronic vehicle controls across the entire automotive industry.

The Academy has begun the process of identifying panel members, and the panel will be established by July. The panel then expects to complete its work within 15 months.

The results of the work from the National Academy of Sciences will be important to NHTSA, not only because of unintended acceleration, but also to provide advice on a range of electronics issues that might affect motor vehicle safety as new electronic crash avoidance and other technologies that are rapidly proliferating in the vehicle fleet.

Separately, we've enlisted NASA scientists with expertise in areas such as computer controlled electronic systems, electromagnetic interference, and software integrity to help tackle the issue of unintended vehicle acceleration in Toyotas. NASA's review will be comprehensive and will assist us in determining whether Toyota vehicles may contain safety defects that would warrant formal investigation.

We believe that pressure applied by NHTSA has been instrumental in bringing about all of the recalls Toyota has undertaken to address unintended acceleration. We will go wherever the evidence leads us to address the root causes of unintended acceleration. We will open additional investigations and push for recalls where warranted.

It is our hope that Toyota's recently revamped approach to more effectively deal with safety defects will reveal a Toyota that is quick to respond to all vehicle safety issues, including unintended acceleration.

Of course, we are working – and will continue working – with this committee and the Senate Commerce Committee on legislative proposals that would address the unintended acceleration issue across the industry. If enacted, this legislation would also significantly enhance NHTSA’s authority and increase the Agency’s leverage in dealing with manufacturers.

This leverage would be particularly important in cases where manufacturers are reluctant to perform necessary safety recalls or are not completely truthful in submitting information to the Agency.

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.